



BLENDING LEARNING: RIGHT SOLUTION FOR FUTURISTIC EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In Online Learning, the students study from home or any other place, that is most convenient for them. They can acquire learning material online. The study materials in online education could be texts, audio, notes, videos, and images. However, the method of study has its benefits and various drawbacks too. Online education is suitable for those who cannot visit or obtain the traditional education method for one reason or the other. Now a days education has changed. A shift in the profile of the student body has changed the face of learning and education. Learning is no longer confined within classroom walls nor are the teachers and students required to be in the same location at the same time. The multiple instructional delivery modalities in blended learning not only accommodate the various learning needs of our students but also give lecturers the freedom and ability to meet other tasks and responsibilities. On-line learning previously rejected as foreign to our distance communities and people's field-dependent cognitive style is being viewed more favorably as part of a blended learning mode.

INTRODUCTION

E-Learning has been widely adopted due to its merits and ease of access and understanding. While 'Blended Learning' is covered in this umbrella of e-learning, this term, however, is quite ambiguous in itself. It widely encompasses the methods of teaching/learning that are an amalgamation of technology and digitization using the traditional teacher/instructor-guided classroom methods.

Blended learning has come a long way since its global acceptance and it goes hand-in-hand with the digital citizenship component, which ensures better future-focused learning methods through proper integration to enhance teaching and learning by developing digital prowess of both the parties involved. It promotes balance between protective and promotional online activities so that the students and teachers can manage their online interactions safely and responsibly.

Definitions of Blended Learning

There are various definitions of blended learning. Some view blended and hybrid learning differently while others look at them as one. This paper takes the latter view. Blended learning combines various models of traditional and distance education and makes use of all types of technology to offer meaningful learning environments for students (Akkoyunlu and Yilmaz Soylu, 2008; 27). It is "an effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning" (Procter, 2003; 3). Olapiriyakul & Scher (2006) use blended and hybrid as one to refer to "the mixed mode of instruction which formally combines face to face learning and distance learning by incorporating technology to facilitate the learning process". This paper defines blended learning as the effective combination of traditional face to face learning and distance learning that incorporates an e-learning component. The online component is of special interest; it was rejected as foreign to our distance communities and people's field-dependent cognitive style (Lieberman, 1994). It marginalized communities and individuals with limited or no access to computer and internet as well as limited knowledge in the use of technology. The absence of a 'human face' to interact with and learn from in online learning also posed a serious handicap for our people who tend to employ field dependence as their cognitive style. Dealing with tangible objects that people can see was easier.

The combination of the benefits of online learning with the advantages of face-to-face instruction can also improve learning in ways mentioned below, that is impossible to achieve using only one method:

- Blended learning promotes a two-way learning experience which is possible through collaboration between the students and the instructors, which can increase substantially via an online training platform
- It facilitates increased access to resources for students and teachers which helps to improve attitude towards learning. This makes blended learning accessible to a wider array of learners worldwide
- It promotes better communication between learners which in turn results in a more engaging and beneficial learning experience
- It enhances teacher and student interaction which helps in better, customized and successful evaluations
- It makes it better for students as they can learn according to their capabilities and capacity
- It provides the flexibility of time and learning environment, where students can learn independently and helps them to be self-paced
- Apart from all these benefits, it also helps a student to inculcate virtues

like responsibility and proper management of time

The digital 'revolution' surely has had its impact and more people have access to technology now more than ever before. The pandemic has served as a catalyst in the adoption of these methods, but this has become the common practice now and people involved seem to prefer these methods over the traditional ones. This gives rise to another concern, which is the lack of proper resources for the people on the opposite end of the spectrum, the teachers. Proper training of staff involved and development of infrastructure is required now that blended learning is being widely adopted. The education system needs to upgrade its resources to better cope with this change and serve the needs of students and teachers alike. Benefits of blended learning

As a result of changing times, students will encounter blended learning opportunities in universities and colleges across North America. This change will eventually be replicated across the world as time goes on.

Common types of blended learning include:

- **Rotation:** Students alternate between classes and online learning.
- **Flipped Classroom:** Students listen to online course lectures at home. Class time is used for projects, group activities or questions about the lectures.
- **Flex:** The majority of instruction takes place online, with face-to-face support as needed.

Blended learning often means that all the necessary learning materials will also be available online, allowing students to access them at any time to refresh their memories, to ensure that they understand the course content or to seek out additional, in-depth resources about a topic of interest.

There are pros and cons to blended learning, but since educators agree that it is here to stay, they are focused on finding the best mix of strategies for each individual course. Knowing the positives and negatives can help students understand how to get the most from blended learning, so let's explore them.

Opportunities in blended learning:

- **Allows for Differences:** Students aren't made from cookie cutters and they learn in different ways. A mix of teaching approaches makes it likely that a larger number of students will absorb the material more easily. It reduces stress for those who find it challenging to keep up during classroom lectures and can increase satisfaction for quicker learners.
- **Availability of Resources:** Students can access online material any time anywhere. They can review the materials as often as they like and study them at their own pace. Blended learning includes new technologies, and for many of today's students, using such technologies is a natural part of everyday life.
- **Enhances Learning:** A blended approach can offer richer, more interactive learning experiences.
- **Better Communication:** Blended learning improves communication between student and teacher. Generally, using technology means offering a variety of methods for communication, such as email, instant messaging, online discussions and news announcements online.
- **Collaboration:** Online tools also allow students to collaborate and communicate better with each other. They can connect via email, text mes-

sages and online discussions, as well as face-to-face in the classroom.

- **Easy Feedback:** Tests can be given online, allowing for easy grading and quick feedback that gives students the opportunity to see where their weaknesses are before they forget what the test covered. Teachers can also quickly get a sense of who is having difficulties with the course material and can take action to address these students' problems.
- **Promotes Autonomy and Responsibility:** When a portion of the material is online, it is up to the students to keep pace and meet deadlines. This is good training for life after graduation.
- **Helps Maintain Focus:** Using a varied collection of tools prevents students from becoming bored with course delivery and material. They stay engaged longer than they would with only books as resources.

Challenges in blended learning:

- **Lack of IT Knowledge:** If students don't understand how to use the necessary technology, there is a learning curve that can interfere with their ability to absorb the course material.
- **Lack of Discipline:** If students aren't disciplined about keeping up with online material, they can easily fall behind in their coursework.
- **Untrained Faculty:** Teachers must be trained to incorporate new technologies successfully into their courses in a way that engages students, making the content accessible.
- **Faculty Flexibility:** Teachers must be open to adjusting their teaching styles to accommodate new ways of delivering material.
- **Competing Priorities:** Students must have the time to do coursework at home, despite the demands of their jobs or extra-curricular activities.
- **Access:** Students must have access to the necessary technologies for blended learning to be successful.
- **Outdated Tools:** The technology used in blended learning must be kept up to date, because students, more than most people, will be adopting the latest technologies.

The Future of Blended Learning: What Educators Need to Know

The pandemic and the increasing use of technology in K-12 education it prompted has added renewed energy to the blended learning movement as most students are now learning in school buildings. About two-thirds of educators are expecting their use of the approach to increase during the 2021-22 school year, according to a July survey by the EdWeek Research Center. Nearly 30 percent said they were betting it would "increase a lot." Just 14 percent expected it to decline.

Blended learning is an approach that leverages both digital tools and face-to-face instruction to offer a more personalized learning experience for each student. Students are typically given greater control over the time, place, and/or pace of learning and often participate in new instructional approaches, such as flipped classroom. The approach is usually built on the premise that students will be attending classes in school buildings.

Thanks in part to a device buying binge in the first year of the pandemic, fueled by federal relief dollars, 74 percent of educators surveyed by the EdWeek Research Center in March said their districts had invested "a lot" in devices since the pandemic started, with nearly another quarter saying their districts had invested at least "some" money.

Is Blended Learning The Future Classroom?

Blended learning seems to be the way forward, but what does this mean for educators, students and institutes? What are the needs of the hour and how do we prepare for the future?

The new generation classroom may be blended, especially when it comes to academic learning. But where does this leave the traditional curriculum? Even the National Education Policy 2020 states that up to 40 per cent of learning may be online. Technology is now essential in the classroom and in 2020 we have seen the rise of many edtech and eLearning platforms. Yet, educators still struggle to engage students. What are the real challenges of blended learning? And what are the technological solutions available?

Educators are mostly in agreement that blended learning is the future. Distance and remote learning have put the onus on the student to know course material. Therefore, the educator's role becomes one of answering questions, clearing doubt and creating discussion in class. "It is going to be the stealing or learning, un-learning and re-learning. These are the 3 words which every teacher has to adapt."

The Key IT Needs

IT infrastructure is the need of the hour for education institutes to be able to deliver quality education.

1. **Cyber security:** Content filtering, student safety, next-gen antivirus and device security.
2. **Remote class management:** manage live class session effectively with tools to share and filter content, screen monitoring, content delivery and calibration tool.
3. **Instructional resources:** Tech-enabled social learning stem readiness and digital care.

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